

Against the Grain

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Headwaters – The Subversion of Referees

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in an old-fashioned card catalog, and the middle school collection of young adult titles, which are housed separately from the main library in a classroom, were poorly organized. It was difficult to locate the desired title(s), difficult to keep accurate records of what items the library owned, difficult to record statistics of library circulation and lending periods, and a wide network of interlibrary loan partners was unavailable to the **St. Thomas School**.

With little time, expertise, or funding to complete the project, it was necessary to enlist the help of outside organizations to get the **St. Thomas School's** library automated. The School Library System had the knowledge, staffing, and tools to create an electronic catalog for the school's library; through the grant received from Capital District Library Council, the School Library System was able to procure the necessary funding to complete the automation project.

The Process

Principal Kane invited us to meet with him and some school representatives on July 12, 2018 to discuss his vision for the school library and what his students' and staff's needs were. We looked at the physical space and number of books and were able to assess their needs and estimate the time required to meet the project goals, develop a plan, including making a list of needed materials, and gathering a team of staff members to execute the plan. We ordered customized scannable barcodes for the books as well as a handheld barcode scanner for the school library; these costs were covered by the grant money. We determined that the project of automating the **St. Thomas School Library** would take four people working six-hour days approximately three weeks in order to complete the automation project before the start of the 2018-19 school year.

The School Library System team worked throughout August and September 2018 on completing the automation project. Our first

step, once working on-site, was to remove all the books from the shelving, organize them by genre or Dewey Decimal classification, and, working on laptops seated at the school library tables, start searching for the titles, one by one, in the School Library System library automation catalog, Follett Destiny. A barcode sticker was placed on the upper right corner of each book cover. Titles were located electronically in the Destiny catalog using ISBN or title; for titles which were already present in our collection we simply added a new copy record for the **St. Thomas** site. If a title was not present in the Destiny catalog, we would find the title, using the book's ISBN or title in OCLC. We downloaded the records as needed from OCLC and then imported them into Destiny; from there, we attached a copy record for the **St. Thomas School Library**.

Once titles were added to the Destiny catalog, we physically organized them on newly constructed library shelving that the school had purchased. Keeping in mind that the library serves a population of students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade as well as the faculty and staff of the school, we divided the collection into "everybody" picture books, organized alphabetically by author's last name, juvenile nonfiction organized by Dewey Decimal numbers, juvenile fiction organized alphabetically by author's last name, and the middle school collection of young adult fiction and nonfiction, organized alphabetically by author's last name or Dewey Decimal number, as appropriate. The books were clearly and accurately labeled and placed in proper order on the shelves for easy locating.

After three weeks of cataloging, organizing books, and getting the library ready for the start of the school year, the **St. Thomas Library** was ready for digital circulation. The team once again worked with **Principal Thomas Kane** to develop a plan to train the certified retired public-school librarian who would be volunteering two to three days a week, along with some parent volunteers on how to access and use the library catalog. We covered the basics of using the Destiny catalog, including searching, circulation, and requesting books

through interlibrary loan, and running basic reports such as overdues.

Outcomes

The automation project was completed in September 2018; the students, faculty, and staff of **St. Thomas** have access to a fully-functioning, accurate and up-to-date library catalog capable of circulation, interlibrary loans, catalog searching, access to eBooks and audiobooks purchased by the School Library System, and patron maintenance. Reporting capabilities include inventory, overdue notices, and many more options for a thorough, accurate portrait of the school library, its patrons, and library activity at any given time.

Linda Berry, retired school librarian, was appointed to be the school's volunteer librarian; she works at the school several days a week, teaching library skills such as searching the catalog and locating library books on the shelves as well as instilling a love of literature and learning through story time read alouds and other activities.

St. Thomas is excited to have the addition of the automated library catalog in their school and the support of the School Library System team and access to the eighty-three other school libraries in the shared catalog.

The Future

Principal Thomas Kane and library staff have reached out to request additional training on using the Destiny catalog. Looking to the future, the School Library System plans to work with **St. Thomas** to help them stay up to date on 21st century learning, collaborating with the faculty to incorporate the library into the curriculum, and to continue growing and adjusting as the needs of library users evolve. We hope to see **St. Thomas School** become involved with our professional development and become active learners and participants in the School Library System and all it has to offer as their comfort level with the Destiny system increases. 🌱

Headwaters — The Subversion of Referees

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Column Editor's Note: *This essay is an updated, revised, and expanded version of a post published on "The Geyser," an e-newsletter written by the author and available at <https://thegeyser.substack.com>.*

Michael Lewis — the author of *Moneyball*, *The Blind Side*, and *The Big Short* — has an uncanny knack for tapping into themes developing in the

zeitgeist. His recent podcast, "Against the Rules,"¹ examines a trend he's observed in society — the decline of the human referee in many parts of daily life, and what that's doing to our idea of fairness.

Disrespect of referees strikes me as profound and highly relevant to publishing, especially scholarly and scientific publishing. Gatekeepers, referees, and the consequences of these have been targeted for years as irrelevant, outmoded, or objectionable. In their

place, we've been given algorithms, feeds, and search engines, all of which gatekeep in their own ways, but without an identifiable (or accountable) human behind them. It's almost as if we accept humans expressed through technology more than we accept humans expressed through a time-tested process.

Lewis' first episode examined the travails of actual refereeing in the **NBA**, talking about how, in the past 1-2 years, the level of argumen-

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tation with referees from superstar players has skyrocketed, despite the refereeing being better than ever — thanks to replay, referee training, and more, **NBA** referees are demonstrably fairer and less biased than ever. To tell his story, **Lewis** visited the replay center in Florida, where calls are reviewed by referees off-site. He talked to psychologists who have found that entitlement makes people more likely to flout rules, believing rules don't apply to them. He noted how referees are being worn down by the threats they experience on- and off-court. Finally, he described how children mimic the exasperated, angry reactions they see from star **NBA** players, driving the cycle of disrespect for referees further into the bloodstream of the sport, and life in general.

An interesting observation among many is that the reason superstar players react so badly to increasingly unbiased and "fair" refereeing is entitlement — they expect their fame and prominence to grant them dispensations from referees. This always makes me return to the anger some scholars and scientists express toward reviewers and editors, which can seem similar in key ways. Do they feel refereeing doesn't apply to them anymore? Or that they are entitled to special privileges?

Lewis' podcast explores other topics — the abdication of regulations around financial institutions that exploit lenders and dodge responsibility for the messes they make, causing financial hardships for students, teachers, and soldiers; the growing disrespect for editors and grammar; and, why ethicists and ombudsmen are losing leverage.

What's causing this trend is a bit of a mystery. There seem to be many sources of subversion of umpires in society, the people calling balls and strikes. There's also been a surge of mildly or wildly corrupt practices enabled by those seeking to disrupt society in some manner — technologically, politically, or economically.

The "disruptive" aspect is interesting to ponder. We've been inundated by people praising disruptive thinkers, disruptive businesses, and disruptive leaders. It's nearly axiomatic in such an environment that anyone seeking to impose order or boundaries looks like a tool or a fool. Who needs or wants order when disruption is the way of the world? What is the reward for order when disruption makes some people billions?

Instant replay has also helped to erode the authority and position of referees in sports. Coaches and spectators are now high-powered armchair referees. For referees, any call might be questioned and overturned. Getting it "right" now counts more than the action, the fluidity, the spontaneity of sport. I personally hope American baseball never goes to an automated strike zone, as the ability for a pitcher to fool a batter *and* an umpire seems like a great part of the game. The same goes for players who make plays that so astound fans and referees alike that the game is distorted

by them. What's wrong with a player able to generate a "reality distortion field"? ala **Steve Jobs**? That's part of the magic.

We're increasingly seeing referees criticized from the top, where the entitled people live. As a psychologist noted to **Lewis**, entitled people sometimes feel the rules don't apply to them. As **Lewis** notes, superstar players are complaining more than ever, rather than modeling excellent sportsmanship. Inequality may play a factor, as entitled people are actually so well-off now that they do live in a different reality, in effect. What referee will or must they respect?

The recent U.S. college admissions scandal involving celebrities and entitled parents³ (and their children) provides an interesting window into this issue. Here were entitled people who felt confident going around the admissions referee. When caught, some confessed and plead guilty, while at least one has defied the courts and prosecutors, apparently convinced her entitled status will ultimately prevail.

A grammarian **Lewis** interviews focuses on the moral relativism that has permeated intellectual life, focusing on his dislike for "descriptive grammar" (in which no native English speaker can be said to ever make a grammatical error) and preference for "prescriptive grammar," in which there are rules and preferences. His feeling is that some writers and speakers no longer feel shame about mistakes in grammar or spelling.

At the same time, people and places that should be acting as referees are not, adding to the erosion of even the concept of an umpire calling balls and strikes. Facebook, Twitter, Google, and YouTube are notorious in my mind because they refuse in most cases to act as referees relative to their own platforms. Only now are some controls coming into place, but the idea that it should be a free-for-all remains strong.

Finally, there is the information space of today, where innuendo is easy to purvey, smears are simple to amplify, and doubt easy to sow. We've seen judges, investigators, and referees of all kinds undermined by allegations of racial bias, corruption, and political motivation, all in an attempt to make them appear less fair and impartial.

As referees have been knocked down a few pegs in various ways, we find ourselves in a world where our assumptions about referees have been modified, so that more of us think referees are:

- Not that different from us, and perhaps just as fallible
- Not worthy of respect, and possibly deserving of resentment
- Possibly corrupt or malign, or able to be portrayed as such

- Irrelevant and unnecessary to the modern information age
- Replaceable by the "crowd" or the empowered individual (see first point)
- Adding little value, slowing things down, and basically annoying us

Given all of the above, how this resolves for scholarly publishing seems to be informed lately by these very dubious questions and claims. Why do we need referees or editors? These people are fallible, aren't respected, aren't necessary in the modern information age, may be malign, are replaceable by the crowd or some rando, and add little value and only slow us down and annoy us.

What **Lewis** finds, however, is that there are people who are natural referees, arbiters, and umpires — individuals who by disposition, inherent ability, and natural demeanor command respect, deliver just decisions, establish zones of fair play as easily as anything, and keep things from becoming imbalanced. But today, we don't celebrate the excellent judge, the superb and consistent editor, or the judicious moderator. We bristle, we rebel, and we push away.

Lewis is onto something here. There is no easy answer, so I'll be listening to his podcast and reading his books for as long as he's productive. He's a good judge of what matters. 🐘

Kent Anderson is the CEO and founder of *Caldera Publishing Solutions*, editor of "*The Geyser*," a past-President of the *Society of Scholarly Publishing*, and founder of "*The Scholarly Kitchen*." He has worked as an executive of a technology startup, and as a publishing executive at numerous non-profits, including the *American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)*, the *Massachusetts Medical Society*, and the *American Academy of Pediatrics*.

Endnotes

1. <https://atrpodcast.com/>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reality_distortion_field
3. <https://thegeyser.substack.com/p/colleges-reject-freelance-corruption>